

A VISIT TO DESERTED RAUSCH GAP

A Mining Village That Went Down When a Colliery Was Closed--Decayed Houses and Other Remains of a Once Busy Hamlet.

The Eagle, the other day, stumbled over the remains of a long-deserted mining village. Rausch Gap was its name, and it was located in Lebanon county on the Schuylkill & Susquehanna Railroad, which runs from Harrisburg to Auburn.

Once the scene of busy activity, it is now only a memory. The ruins of scores of miners' dwellings and several industries and a graveyard, overgrown with brush, are alone left to tell the story of its desolation. It is surrounded for miles around by a wilderness of forest growth and timberland.

The name of the place is painted on a board, which is nailed against a telegraph pole, but few of the passengers on the passing trains know anything of its history, or even of the existence of the former town. Stops are seldom made there, and only a few old residents of that thinly-settled country who lived there when Rausch Gap flourished are left to tell of its former prosperity.

In company with one of these men, the Eagle visited the place. It was located on a level tract of land covering probably 100 or more acres between two spurs of the Blue mountains. The town was regularly laid out with streets running at right angles.

On these bordered the dwellings of the miners. There were about 75 of them. Each had a good sized yard or garden. The houses were of frame and of substantial construction.

The cellars of scores of others had been dug and walled out, ready to be built upon, when the crash came. A nearby coal mine, which had been opened under most favorable conditions was shut down, and Rausch Gap's doom was sealed. There was nothing for the miners to do, and they vacated the place.

Some of the frame houses were bodily moved to Pinegrove and elsewhere. Others were burned and the remainder allowed to go to decay.

The cellar walls fell in, and to-day the entire tract is overrun with weeds and brush. Trees have sprung up and the timber here is almost as thick as on some other parts of the mountain.

Snakes crawl in and out of the piles of stones, while catamounts now have their lair in the midst of what was once a flourishing town of nearly 500 people.

Where gardens were cultivated by the miners and their families are still seen the evidences of a former civilization. Here and there are growing vegetables in a wild state, while the timber has been unable to force out all the fruit trees, and to-day there are still on the property pear, plum and cherry, with grape vines growing in profusion.

The Eagle found pieces of several wood-burning stoves, so common half a century ago, and near the ruins of several houses were the remains of old fashioned bake ovens.

Rausch Gap had a Catholic and a Protestant Church, and the foundation walls of both are still standing in the midst of what will in time be a regular forest of timber. It is nothing to see trees over a foot in diameter growing out of the cellars.

Heavy stone walls started deep in the ground show where a good-sized machine shop once stood. By digging up the ground an occasional bolt or nut can be found. Nearby was the school house. This was also of frame, which has all been removed, but a neatly-cut stone, which was undoubtedly the corner stone, is still to be seen in one end of the cellar wall, while here and there the visitors picked up rude pieces of slate upon which the children of another generation "did their sums."

Further up the mountain is located the Rausch Gap Graveyard. There is no evidence that it has been visited by human beings for years, and a more lonely place where the Angel Gabriel's horn will be heard on the last great day it is hard to imagine. The graves are overrun with brush and weeds, chestnut sprouts are growing here and there and sunken places show where a human body has been buried. Many are unmarked and others have grave stones almost illegible.

It is estimated that at least 60 bodies have been interred here. They include several soldiers of the Mexican War—Andrew Allen, who was killed in the coal mines; the Williams, Black, Prout and other families. The nearest P. O. S. of A. camp will likely pay some attention to this graveyard, and particularly to the resting places of the war veterans.

Continuing their investigations, the visitors came across the entrance to the shaft of the Raush Gap coal mine. The timbers are rotten and it was considered dangerous to explore. Near the entrance is a great pile of coal. "That," said the Eagle's informant, "contains at least 3,000 tons, and better coal has never been burned in this State.

It is good, free-burning anthracite, broken into pea and chestnut sizes, but for some reason, the present owners won't sell it. Pushing on through the timber the visitors reached the breaker. This has fallen into decay.

The machinery has been dismantled and nothing remains in tact by the stone stack at least 60 feet high. Not far away is the last vestige of a railroad, which conveyed the coal from the mines. Some of the rails have been taken up and the sills have almost disappeared.

At this point Rausch creek had been arched to a height of 50 feet, over which the railroad passed, but most of the bridge now lies in the ravine below. On every

hand nature is effacing the ruin that time has wrought, but it will be many years before all the evidences of Rausch Gap mining village will have been wiped out. The town was commenced about 1850. For the next eight or ten years, it flourished.

Mines were opened and operated. The place increased in population. Two similar towns were started several miles away and both were close competitors of Rausch Gap. To-day they are in a similar state of decay. First individual operators prospected for coal, and then opened mines in a small way. Then the coal companies arrived on the ground.

Success in striking a good coal which found a ready sale in the market, led to jealousies between contending corporations, who fought each other in the courts, until they had exhausted themselves, when the P. & R. Coal and Iron Company stepped in and secured possession, and to-day it owns thousands of acres of land in that end of Schuylkill and the neighboring county of Lebanon, all of which is supposed to contain coal, but there have been no attempts at operation for over 40 years. Rausch Gap is but four miles from St. Joseph's Well, the scene of the famous Reber murder.